

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Contact: Neil Bradley (RSC) 202-226-9717
Aimee Steel (Toomey) 202-225-6411**

Conservatives Outline Concerns with Interior Appropriations Bill

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Members of the House Republican Study Committee expressed strong concerns about the FY 2003 Interior Appropriations bill approved by the Appropriations Committee this week and scheduled for consideration by the full House within the next week.

“There is consensus among the Members of the Republican Study Committee that the Interior Appropriations bill as reported by the Appropriations Committee is unacceptable. There are two fundamental problems with the bill,” said Rep. Pat Toomey (R-PA) Chairman of the RSC Budget Task Force.

First, the bill includes \$700 million in emergency spending for Fiscal Year 2002 for wildfire suppression. While the entire nation is aware of devastating fires that have been burning across the country, the \$700 million figure approved by the Committee is not based on any particular request or demonstrated need. The Bush Administration is in the process right now of determining what, if any, additional funds are needed for wildland fire suppression. Approving funds without any idea of what is actually needed is simply imprudent. Even if an immediate need arose, the Administration already has the authority to access \$1.3 to \$2.1 billion in additional funding to fight fires. Furthermore, if the Administration determines that additional funds are needed, the appropriate place to add such funds is the pending FY 2002 Supplemental Appropriations bill which could be finished within the next several weeks. The FY 2003 Interior Appropriations bill will not likely be enacted for the next several months.

Second, separate and apart from the \$700 million in FY 2002 emergency spending, the bill as approved by the Committee is now approximately \$777 million above the President’s request for Fiscal Year 2003. The subcommittee allocations approved by the Appropriations Committee before the July 4th recess already called for a \$717 million increase above the President’s request, yet the Committee added an additional \$60 million. The Committee has indicated that this increase will be paid for by spending less money on the Commerce / Justice / State Appropriations bill and the VA / HUD Appropriations bill, yet each of these bills is already hundreds of millions of dollars below the President’s request. By taking money from bills that will be considered later in the process, such as Commerce / Justice / State and VA / HUD, to plus-up the bills being considered earlier in the process, the Appropriations Committee is placing the House in the position of either breaking the budget cap or approving bills that underfund President Bush’s request for items such as Veterans, FEMA, and Homeland Security.

“The Republican Study Committee is committed to working with the Leadership and, if necessary, on the floor to ensure that these problems are solved,” Toomey concluded.

###